

Humility, by Father Richard Frederick Clarke, SJ

## **Preface**

The following pages are based in great measure on the beautiful little treatise issued by Our Holy Father Pope Leo XIII on the subject of humility. They can be read and utilized at any time but if used from the beginning of Lent, these meditations will leave the reader free to turn, during Passion Week and Holy Week, to the Sacred Passion of Jesus Christ.

# **The Importance of Humility**

Humility is not only important to the welfare of our souls, it is also absolutely necessary to obtain grace from Almighty God. He resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. Pride is an insuperable bar to the entrance of grace into the soul, and as we can do nothing good in the sight of God without the assistance of His grace, we must have at least some degree of humility before we can do anything pleasing to Him. In proportion to our humility will be the grace given us, and the supernatural virtue to which we shall attain. The first thing I must do if I wish to please God more is to humble myself more.

Humility is not only necessary to the obtaining of grace but, without it, we are the enemies of God. He resists the proud; that is, they have God fighting against them and regarding them as His enemies. How awful a thing to have God for our adversary. It was this that rendered the devils forever accursed.

In one moment, the humility of their subjection of themselves in their love of God confirmed the Holy Angels in perfect happiness to all eternity. If I wish God to fight for me, not against me, the first condition is humility.

Humility is a necessary condition of entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. "Unless you become as little children," says our Divine Lord, "you cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." He loves the humble and no one who has in his heart the spirit of humility need have any fear of death and judgment.

O my God, am I really humble? Is there not still in me, alas, a spirit of pride hateful to Thee? Drive out from me all pride and fill me with true humility, that I may be fit for Thee and fit for Heaven.

## **The Obligation of Humility**

Every Christian as such is under an obligation to follow in the sacred footsteps of Jesus Christ, and to make His Life the model of his own. In the life of the Son of God on earth, the most wonderful feature is its humility. That the omnipotent God should so humble Himself as to take the form of the lowest of the rational creatures that He has made is an almost incredible marvel. The condescension, the lowering of Himself that is involved in it, altogether passes our power of comprehension. He could not have stooped so low unless He had been God. Thus, His humility becomes the characteristic feature of the Incarnation, and in proportion as we lower ourselves we imitate Jesus upon earth.

Our Lord is not satisfied with teaching us by His example; He also gives a positive command. "Learn of Me for I am meek and humble of heart." Out of all the virtues, He came to teach us, He selects His humility as that to the practice of which He binds us, by which we are to become like to Him. How indifferent, how disobedient I have shown myself to our Lord's command.

Can I say that I have learnt the lesson of meekness and humbleness of heart?

We are also bound to practice humility as children of the Catholic Church. Humility and submission is the very essence of her teaching - subjection to God, subjection to all lawful authority, subjection of will and intellect to the dogmas of Faith. He who is not content with subjection cannot be a really good Catholic and no one can love subjection without humility. Examine your own heart, whether you rejoice in being subject for Christ's sake.

## **The Foundation of Humility**

No one can review his past life without finding therein motives enough and to spare for humbling himself before Almighty God. "We have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly, we have revolted; to us belongeth shame and confusion of face." (Daniel 9:5,7) If ever we are inclined to think much of ourselves, we have only to look back on our past years. Look upon the deliberate sins against charity, against truthfulness, against purity. Look upon the pride, the selfishness, the self-will, the neglect of God. Look upon the sins that have stained our lives.

Besides actual sins, how many infidelities to grace have we committed! God has been so liberal with His graces, and I have been so negligent in availing myself of them. How many I might have earned if I had been faithful and had not willfully turned aside from what God asked of me to follow my own will and pleasure. What cause for humiliation of myself! If others who have perhaps lived and died in sin had had my graces, would they not have made a far better use of them than I have made? To me, O God, shame and confusion of face! I must throw myself on Thy mercy and humbly beg forgiveness.

When, moreover, I look at what I now am, I find fresh cause for humbling myself. I might have been a saint if I had been more faithful and now I am one of the vilest of sinners. My soul in the sight of God is disfigured by sin, as a body is by the ulcers and sores that spoil its natural beauty and comeliness. I abound with faults innumerable. I am unworthy to appear in the presence of God. "O hide Thy face from my sins, blot out all my iniquities!"

## **The Deeper Foundations of Humility**

The consciousness of past sin will not of itself give us the perfection of humility. It necessarily fixes the eye of the soul upon ourselves and our own doings, whereas perfect humility means the annihilation of self. We have a deeper and more solid foundation for this virtue in our own nothingness, and the absence of any sort of good save that which God has given us. Every gift of nature is simply a free gift from Him. All that is from ourselves is the marring and injuring of what we have received; the misuse of talents, money, position, influence. What folly, then, to pride ourselves on what belongs to God.

Regarding supernatural gifts, we are still mere nothing and less than nothing. Our natural gifts are put into our hands, they remain with us and are in some sense ours; but a supernatural gift requires a fresh giving immediately from the hand of God each time that it is given us. We cannot begin any supernatural work without His preventing grace; we cannot move a step in it without fresh grace to carry on; we cannot bring it to a successful issue without the grace necessary to complete it. Do I realize, as I ought, this nothingness of myself and my absolute and continual dependence upon God for each thought or act pleasing to Him?

If this is so, how can I be anything but humble? To pride myself on what God does in me would be ridiculous; to pride myself on what I can do of myself would be to pride myself on all that mars and spoils the work of God. "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" asks Saint Paul. Yes, O Lord, I have only one thing that I have not received, and that is my vileness, misery, sin. Can I boast of these?

## **What Humility Is Not**

We are inclined sometimes to aim at a false humility, and so to be hindered in our attainment of true humility. We must be on our guard against errors in this.

Humility does not consist in shutting our eyes to the talents, ability, graces, and accomplishments that we possess. To do so is to refuse to acknowledge the good gifts that God had given us. If we have skill in music, in conversation, in painting, in languages, it is no humility to deny the fact. We ought to thank God for His goodness in bestowing upon us this talent. What is contrary to humility is to take the credit to ourselves, and to plume ourselves on what we have received from God.

Humility does not consist in self-depreciation and in running ourselves down before others. This is often a cloak for pride. Sometimes its object is to obtain from others the praise we deny to ourselves; sometimes it is a marked expression of discontent. The continual song, "What a poor worm am I" is very much opposed to the spirit of the Catholic Church, and to the cheerfulness that every Christian ought to show in his words.

Nor does humility consist in, or even admit of discouragement. If we are discouraged, it generally means that we think more about our own success than about the glory of God. It means that we are not perfectly resigned; it means that our pride is wounded and our self-will thwarted, or that we have worldly motives in what we do, and seek honor from men and not from God. True humility is willing to fail in its projects if God so wills it. Examine yourself on these particulars, and see whether yours is true or false humility.

# What Humility Is

Humility is a realization of our own nothingness before Almighty God. It is defined by Saint Bernard as the virtue by which a man becomes vile in his own eyes through a thorough knowledge of himself; and by Saint Thomas as a virtue by which a man, considering his own defects, keeps himself in the lowest place according to his degree. Think over these definitions, and examine yourself whether you are humble as judged by them.

It is not enough to be conscious of our own vileness or to esteem ourselves as nothing. We must acquiesce in, and be satisfied with our own nothingness. Humility is not perfect until self is so obliterated that we are willing to be esteemed according to our deserts. When we can honestly say that what we look to in all our thoughts, words and actions is not our own advantage and interest, but simply the honor of God, quite independently of what will further our own profit, then we may begin to thank God that we are in the way of humility.

If this is really the case, we shall not only esteem ourselves as vile, but we shall desire to be treated accordingly. We shall not shrink from being humbled in the eyes of men, but shall court humiliation, as it will be a satisfaction to us to be treated as we deserve. This is hard for human nature, but it is possible for all with the grace of God. It will not come at once, but we may hope to reach it someday. Have I attained it? Do I desire it? Do I even accept humiliations, or do I chafe under them and resent them?



## **Aids to Humility**

To foster in ourselves a spirit of humility, we must not only look back but also look forward. When we appear before our Lord to be judged, what reason we shall have for shame and for dismay! How can I who am so full of sin venture to face Him who sees through every disguise, and recognizes the true nature of every action? How can I meet Him who has witnessed deeds of evil hidden from the eyes of men, and wicked and uncharitable thoughts indulged in secret? When I think of that day, I must be humble.

Nothing will then be such a cause of shame to me as my pride. Nothing will so turn away the face of my Judge from me in anger. If God abhors the proud, how can I look forward to that day without trembling? Saint Teresa said that when she had the privilege of seeing our Blessed Lord in a vision, the prevailing thought in her mind was what a terrible thing it would be if He were to be angry with her. He will be angry with me, then, unless I learn more humility. O my God, make me humble at any cost!

What will be the punishment of pride? Will it be the fire of Hell that was prepared for the devil and his angels simply and solely because of their pride? None will endure such misery as the proud; not the gluttonous, or the impure, or the covetous, except so far as their other vices fostered pride in them. O my God, if nothing else will make me humble, grant that the thought of the lowest Hell, reserved for the proud, may conquer in me that hateful vice of pride.

## **The Attainment of Humility**

Humility does not spring up in our souls of its own accord. On the contrary, every child of Adam has a deep root of pride within his soul. It is only by a long and painful process that the generality of mankind can attain humility. We cannot expect to become humble unless we fulfill the necessary conditions.

We must make many acts of humility before we can attain any proficiency in the virtue. Our acts of humility must consist not merely in protesting to Almighty God that we are vile and worthless in His sight and in humbling ourselves before Him by reason of our many sins. Our They must be practiced towards others by being very gentle towards those who provoke us, by bearing contradictions with patience, by accepting disappointments with patience and rebuffs without complaint. All this is a gradual process and we must not expect proficiency in humility until we have long practiced these means to attain it.

We must pray for humility. No gift of God can be won without prayer and humility least of all, because it is so opposed to the natural bent of our nature, and can never be had without a special grace from God. Prayer, moreover, is an acknowledgement of our dependence on God, and humility consists in nothing else than a recognition of this dependence and an acquiescence in it. Pray, then, for humility.

It is not much use praying for humility unless we also pray for the means that are to implant it in our souls. We must ask God from our hearts not to spare us if He sees that we shall not become humble without suffering. We must leave ourselves in His hands, saying only, "O my God, make me humble at any cost!"

## Humility in Conversation

Our Lord tells us that by our words we shall be justified, by our words we shall be condemned, and from our words can be clearly seen whether we are humble or proud. The proud man always wants to take the lead in the conversation and to lay down the law for the benefit of the rest. The humble man is content to be in the background. The proud man is vexed if he is not listened to while the humble man is ready to accept such disregard with peaceful resignation, as a humiliation he welcomes from the hand of God. On these points, do I exhibit marks of pride or of humility?

There is, moreover, in the conversation of the proud an undercurrent of self-praise. They talk chiefly about themselves and what they have said and done and in a tone of boastfulness more or less thinly veiled. The humble seem to forget themselves; they consider what is interesting to those to whom they talk, and they do this because for God's sake they seek to please others rather than themselves. Try to cultivate this humility in conversation. It will make you loved by God and by men.

We perceive the contrast between humility and pride most clearly when some rebuff is given.

See the meekness of the one and the indignation of the other; the patience of the one, and the eagerness of the other to assert himself and prove himself in the right. In this respect, we shall do well to contemplate the perfect humility of the Holy Mother of God at the marriage-feast at Cana. In answer to the apparent rebuke that she received from her Son, she uttered not a word of self-justification, but an instruction to the servants to be exact in their obedience to Jesus.

## Humility and Criticism

The spirit of criticism is very dangerous to humility. He who criticizes puts himself above the person or the action criticized, and becomes the self-constituted judge. He looks down on it and this even though he gives it his patronizing approval. All this is at variance with the spirit of humility. Our attitude to the actions of others should be to try to praise and admire as from below, or if we cannot do this, to abstain from speaking if we can, or to make excuses for those who are obviously in fault.

Unjust and bitter criticism is one of the marks of inveterate pride. The devil is the accuser of the brethren. Much that he urges against them is true, but this is no excuse. Much is false and, in this, those who criticize rashly and uncharitably are sure to imitate their model. They fall unconsciously into false and rash judgments; and even where they were quite certain that they were right, they nevertheless often do serious wrong to those whom they criticize. If they were more humble, they would have a clearer and truer view of characters and actions of those around them.

Yet how general is this habit of criticism! Many who are reputed good Catholics run down their neighbors with a freedom which shows how little they have imbibed of the spirit of the Church and of her saints. A saint is always most gentle in his judgments and words, and seeks to imitate his Master, when He said to the poor woman trembling at His feet, "Neither do I condemn thee." Ask yourself whether you are free from fault in this respect, and promise amendment.

## Humility and Curiosity

Curiosity at first sight does not seem to have any direct bearing on humility but, in point of fact, it is very injurious to humility. Those who pry into matters that do not concern them will find this eagerness after unnecessary information very injurious to their humility. It is opposed to the quiet, peaceful temper of one who does his own work without concerning himself with that of others. It leads to criticism, the habit of rash judgment, and a dissatisfaction with what goes on around us. It makes the mind dissipated and unsettled and fosters a sort of unhealthy activity outside our own sphere of duty.

Curiosity does not mean that we should not be eager for knowledge, but not for knowledge that does not directly or indirectly help forward the work that God has given us to do. What are the affairs of our neighbors to us? We say, perhaps, that it will increase our influence to know them. It certainly will not increase our influence for good. It may puff us up with an idea of our own importance, and make us fancy that others admire us for it; but to know too much is not only most dangerous to our humility, but it alienates others from us, and makes them fear and dislike us.

Curiosity is one of the effects of pride. In Eve, it was the immediate effect of her sin of pride. Before she had indulged a rebellious thought against God, she had no wish for knowledge that God had forbidden. It is often the stepping-stone from pride to other sins - to evil speaking, to luxury, to greediness, to lying; and above all, to the weakening of faith and hope. Examine yourself whether you indulge in this dangerous habit of curiosity.

## Humility and Impulsive Action

Actions done on impulse and without reflection proceed from nature, not from grace. A generous nature acts from generous impulses. A selfish nature acts from the ever-present impulses to provide for the interests of self. Such actions do not obtain grace from God or deserve a reward in Heaven. They mark the direction of the stream, but do not assist it on its way. Ask yourself, "Do I in general act from impulse? In what direction does impulse carry me?"

What has impulsive action to do with humility? A good deal! It always has pride at its root, like most other faults. The humble man avoids impulsive action with the greatest care. Impulsive action springs from self and fails to recognize our dependence upon God - and dependence upon God is of the essence of humility. Even though my impulses may be good, yet I must never allow myself to act merely from impulse, but must try to raise my heart to God, and so supernaturalism even those actions in which there is no time for careful deliberation.

How dangerous is impulse! How often I have bitterly regretted actions done on the impulse of the moment! I knew I had better wait before speaking or acting, but I was not willing to resist the desire to gratify my impulsive nature. I was not held back by the secret consciousness that what I was doing was sinful, imperfect, and ill judged. How many imprudent words, how many foolish actions, and how many actual sins have proceeded from my forgetting or refusing to acknowledge my continual dependence upon God.

## Humility in Our Estimate of Ourselves

There is no better test of humility than the opinion we form about others as compared with ourselves. If we had to make a list of the virtuous, in what position should we place ourselves? A man who is truly humble will place himself not only last, but least, with a great interval between himself and the rest of mankind. Saint Dominic used to place himself in spirit beneath the feet of the very demons, as being far worse than them. Saint Paul declared himself the very worst of sinners. Can I honestly speak of myself thus? Do I regard myself as the worst of all men in the sight of God?

What should be the ground of this humility? We must not attempt impossibilities. I ought not to think myself worst of all unless I really am so. It may be that I cannot truthfully say that I am in the habit of committing mortal sins. How, then, can I be worse than the notorious sinner? Yet when I think of all the graces God has given me, I must confess that if He had given them to those who sin most deeply, they would be far better than I am. My only superiority is in greater graces. Humble yourself at the thought of all the graces you have received, and of your frequent failures to co-operate with them.

Even if we had never sinned, this would not free us from the obligation of putting ourselves below all and beneath all. Our exemption would be no credit to ourselves. It would simply be a fresh gift of God, which ought to make us more vividly conscious of our vileness and nothingness in His sight. We must always be as nothing in His sight, but sin makes us worse than nothing. It makes us a blot upon creation, inferior to the dumb creatures that have never sinned.

## **The Patience of Humility**

The humble are always patient, and these two virtues are most intimately connected with each other. He who forms a low estimate of himself is convinced that it is well for him to suffer, to be contradicted, to wait for others, to be thwarted in his projects, to have to bear with the ill temper of others and the unkindness of others. He regards all this as his due and takes it accordingly.

Am I thus patient and ready to submit to the disagreeable?

On the other hand, impatience is one of the surest signs of hidden pride. If we detect ourselves giving in to impatience and getting "put out" when we cannot get our own way and carry all before us, we may put it down as certain that we are still very deficient in the virtue of humility. Even physical impatience (except when it arises from weakness and ill health) is a mark of pride. It shows that we have not learned perfectly the lesson of submission. Alas, how impatient I am in spite of long years of striving after virtue. How deeply rooted pride must be in me! How can I get rid of this most detestable of vices!

One of the best means of acquiring humility is to school ourselves in patience. Every day a hundred occasions present themselves when we can, if we choose, check the rising spirit of impatience. We wait at a friend's door or we are kept back by persons who come in our way while walking. Some sound annoys us or others take our turn or place. All these are splendid opportunities to acquire humility by schooling ourselves to patient endurance.



## **The Sweetness of Humility**

The humble are always pleasant to deal with, and pleasant in their conversation. They always try to consult the wishes of the person with whom they have to deal. They conduct themselves as his inferior. They forget themselves and their own interests, and so are able to enter into his wishes and see things as he himself sees them. They are ready to give way to him and they have a high esteem for his opinion, and their words and behavior show this. Ask yourselves if these are your characteristics.

The humble show a special sweetness towards those to whom they are naturally disinclined, and whom they are tempted to regard with repugnance and aversion. Instead of turning their back on such and having nothing to do with them, they recognize in this natural aversion a sign of pride against which they must struggle and which has to be overcome. They remember that, in themselves, there are defects far greater than those they dislike in others. Remembering this, they not only put up with the disagreeable qualities of others, but for this reason they also determine, with a sort of Divine generosity, to show the greater kindness to them.

This is always the conduct of the saints. We admire their self-conquest in tenderly nursing those affected with loathsome diseases or in kissing their sores; but we should admire still more their gentleness to those who insult them and their sweetness and charity to the coarse, rude, and brutal. This is the way to win sinners to Christ. This is the way to attain solid peace and joy of heart. It is the charity of Christ overcoming self that makes the humble always contented and happy.

## **The Beauty of Humility**

Humility is not only sweet and pleasant to others; it is beautiful in itself. Humility is the primary means to attain a likeness to God since His image in us cannot be perfect as long as there is any vestige of pride present in our hearts. When humility has driven out the opposing vice, we then become indeed like to God. We share the Divine beauty and are the object of the admiration of the holy Angels, and even of God Himself, who then speaks to the soul in the words of the Divine Lover in the Canticles, "Thou art all fair, my beloved, and there is no spot in thee."

Humility is also beautiful because it is the root whence all other virtues spring. We may say of it that it has in itself the combined beauty of all. If we find a man humble, we know that he must needs be patient, charitable, unselfish, generous, obedient, and we cannot help admiring and loving him.

Might not my deficiency in these virtues be due to my lack of humility? O my God, plant this most indispensable and most attractive virtue firmly in my heart!

Nothing will so quickly render us conformed to the Divine beauty of the Son of God as humility. "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart." If we desire to draw men to us and to attract them, to be efficient in moving their hearts and influencing them for good, we must first learn this lesson of humility from Him whose Soul was beautiful beyond that of all the sons of men, because none had humility like His.

## Humility under Trials

When God lays His heavy hand upon us, we have an excellent opportunity of exercising the virtue of humility, and of making great progress in it. There is nothing like a good knockdown blow for teaching us our own nothingness, and for schooling us in submission to God. If we take the chastisement well and do not allow ourselves to rebel against the will of God, but rather make it an occasion for humbling ourselves the more in His sight, we shall acquire more grace from God and advance more in perfection in a day than in months of prosperity and spiritual consolation. How do I bear the trials God sends - well, or ill?

When the time of darkness is upon us and the gloom seems almost intolerable, there is no harm in praying for release from our misery or that God may avert some threatened blow, but the petition must always be accompanied by an act of humility, "Not my will, but Thine be done!" If we are patient, God will certainly send us speedy relief; just when we least expect it, peace will be restored to our souls.

Those trials are intended by God to cleanse our souls, and to root up the pride that still lurks unnoticed by us. The best prayer for us to offer under them, and indeed at all times and at all seasons, is to cry out to God, "Humble me, O God, and I shall be humbled. Burn out of me now in this life all that displeases Thee that I may not have to endure the burning of the life to come!" Happy are those who in all trouble can offer this prayer!

# Humiliation

Humiliation is a very painful thing, and our pride shrinks from it. Yet it is a necessary step to humility. We must be humbled in order that we may be humble. We must learn not to shun dishonor if we are to learn not to crave honor from men. When some slight is shown us, when we are passed over or put down, or judged unfairly, we have an excellent opportunity of advancing in humility by accepting with patience and resignation the contempt and dishonor, and not attempting to defend ourselves or assert our rights and our claim to be treated with consideration and respect.

When we commit some fault which causes others to think less of us, we should be full of sorrow at the thought of having offended God, and given dis-edification to our neighbor, but we must not seek to shun the just contempt we have deserved, or allow ourselves to be miserable at the thought of being despised. On the contrary, we must be content to be esteemed according to our merits, and must thank God for teaching us this lesson, and giving us a greater insight into ourselves.

It is a sure sign of pride if we seek to shirk the consequences of our fault as Saul did when he begged Samuel still to honor him before the ancients of Israel (1 Kings 15:30). Such conduct only brings fresh humiliations. God, who resists the proud, always brings down those who refuse to humble themselves. The devils who would not willingly bow the knee before Christ made Man were forced to do so. God sooner or later will force all the proud, willingly or unwillingly, to bow before Him.

## **The Presentation of Humility**

When God gives us consolation and peace of soul we are in danger of losing our sense of dependence and our humility, unless we bear in mind that:

- All this happiness is a gift of God that, at any moment, He might take from us and, if He does but turn His face from us, our joy will be turned to sorrow and heaviness.
- We live continually on the edge of a precipice and, without a humble reliance upon God, we shall be sure to fall over it.
- Prayer to God is necessary to keep us humble and to keep us from attributing to ourselves His good gifts.

However great may be the graces given us, and however high the degree of virtue we may attain, we are never safe unless we remember that we have in ourselves an inextinguishable fount of sin and weakness, of concupiscence and rebellion against God, otherwise our very graces may prove our ruin. We must cry out to God each morning as Saint Philip did, "Beware of me, O my God, this day, lest I betray Thee." Guard me against myself and the traitor within my heart that makes me so often unfaithful to Thee. Heal my soul, which abounds with what is displeasing to Thee.

Those who have great natural talents are in especial danger unless they cultivate constant dependence upon God. Their very ability is a danger to them and makes them plume themselves on what they are able to effect. Nabuchodonosor did this and for a time God took from him his reason until he recognized his own nothingness. Beware of priding yourself on anything you do, lest God take away that talent that has been the cause of so great an evil.

## Certain Temptations against Humility

It is not easy to be humble when we are praised and flattered. Our self-love sucks in with eagerness the words of compliment. We think they must be partly true, or at least we are tempted to exult in the high opinion that others profess of us. Such occasions are very perilous to humility. We should do well to think of Herod when the people listened to his oration and shouted out, "It is the voice of a god and not of a man." We read that, because he took the glory to himself instead of giving it to God, he was smitten down by the Angel of the Lord and died miserably (Acts 12).

Yet we cannot help being pleased when others speak kindly of us and we ought to be pleased when our superiors commend us, but we must observe certain precautions.

- We must take care to rejoice rather in the kindness of others than in their praise.
- We must strive to forget ourselves, raise our hearts to God, and offer Him our success.
- We must make an act of humility at the thought that, if those who praise us saw us as God sees us, they would despise, not honor us.

If we find we are puffed up by praise, this is fresh proof of our imperfection. The saints disliked and dreaded praise and, when they were blamed unjustly, thanked God and took it as a mark of His love and favor. Father Lancicius used to consider unjust reproaches as pure gains because they had no drawback of self-reproach or regret. Which do I accept most gladly, undue praise or undeserved blame?

## **Humility under Correction**

To have to recognize defects in ourselves is always painful to human nature. We should like to think ourselves perfect, or at any rate free from any very serious faults. In spite of all our efforts, the knowledge of our many imperfections and blemishes thrusts itself upon us and the difference between the man of good-will and the lover of self is that one turns himself with all his energy to cure his defects and the other seeks to palliate them, excuse them, and hide them as best he can from himself and others.

One of the best means of getting rid of our faults is to be told of them by others. Here again, another signal difference is seen between the proud man and the humble. The one is grateful for the correction and turns at once to avail himself of it. The other resents it and is more inclined to think how he can revenge himself on his reprover than how he can remedy his own defect. Judged by this test, am I among the proud or the humble? When reproved, is my first impulse vexation and anger or sorrow and a wish to amend?

There is still another test. The proud sometimes avail themselves of a reproof and correct their faults because of the reproof. Yet they seek to conceal from their reprover the fact that they are following his counsel. They will not acknowledge that they are being guided by the reprover. Those who are truly humble rejoice in letting others see that they are adopting their advice in submitting themselves to reproof with gratitude as coming from God and as a favor bestowed on them. Can I stand this test?

## Humility in Success

When Saint Peter and his companions had, at this word of Jesus, cast their nets and enclosed the miraculous draught of fishes, Saint Peter's first impulse was to throw himself at Jesus' feet and humbly cry, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" Success, instead of puffing him up, made him recognize his own sinfulness and unworthiness of the favors that God had done him. This should be the effect of success on us - to humble ourselves and declare ourselves unworthy of such benefits as God has bestowed upon us.

Yet success is meant to encourage us. We cannot help being conscious of having done well and given satisfaction and it would be foolish and ungrateful to ignore the fact. But, our spirit must be that of Saint Bernard, who did not deny the marvels that God had wrought through him. Instead, he expressed his astonishment that God could make use of such an instrument. So, we should regard it as fresh proof of God's power and love, that He should work the marvels of His grace through us.

Thus, to humble ourselves amid the approval and applause of others is no easy task. It is very possible to cry out, "Not unto us, O Lord, but to Thy Name be the praise," and all the time to be puffed up with pride. The real test is whether we pray at such moments, "Humble me, O Lord. Teach me my own nothingness, make me continually depend on Thee, and in my heart attribute to Thee all the glory and to myself nothing." Such a prayer, if it comes from our heart, is a certain safeguard for our humility.



## Humility under Failures

It may seem comparatively easy to be humble when we fail and are disappointed but, in fact, it is a very difficult task. Failures wound our pride, and wounded pride is wont to resent the smart. Either anger, rage, or a desire for revenge on those who have caused our failure supervenes, or else we are utterly cast down and dispirited, and ready to give up all further effort. Ask yourself how failures affect you.

Yet even when they are not borne altogether as they should be, failures are very useful to the soul. Under their influence, we can scarcely keep from having a lower opinion of ourselves, and learning the necessary lesson of endurance of what we dislike. It yields, almost without any co-operation on our part, the peaceable fruit of justice to those that are exercised thereby (Hebrews 12:11). Though failure may bring out evil tendencies which are more powerful to us, and of which we cannot help being conscious, yet the unconscious pride that success engenders is far more dangerous to the soul. Thank God, then, for your failures.

What would be our spirit under failure or apparent failure?

- We must not be cast down or dispirited, but begin again cheerily.
- We must beware of blaming others who have caused or contributed to it.
- We must attribute it to our own defects or to the just judgment of God punishing our sins in the past.
- We must thank God for it, offer it up to Him, and beg that it may make us more humble.
- We must remember that, for those who love God, there is no failure.

All is success under the guise of failure, for to those who love God all things work together for good.

# Consciousness of Humility

How are we to know whether we are humble?

If we think we are humble, we may be quite sure that we are not really humble at all. There is no more certain sign of pride than to be unaware of its existence in ourselves. What Saint ever lived who did not acknowledge and lament his pride and self-love? A Saint who should believe himself to be thoroughly humble would be no Saint at all. How far do I recognize in myself an ever-running sore of pride, making me foul and unsightly before God, who hates the proud and gives grace only to the humble?

If I find that I take disparaging remarks, attacks, and contradictions from others with patience and good humor, it is a good sign, but not a certain sign, that I am humble. Pride that apes humility often renders man proof against what others think. He wraps himself in his cloak of pride and looks down on their opinion of him. Indifference to the praise and honor of those around us is not a certain sign, for this too may come from pride and a spirit of contempt.

But if anyone:

- recognizes himself as full of pride;
- dislikes the idea of being honored and praised;
- desires humiliations and prays for them; or
- thinks himself to deserve the worst of everything and the lowest place,

he may hope that he has begun to walk the road that in the end may through God's grace produce in him the virtue of humility. Examine yourself on these points, thank God for any signs of progress and lament over still remaining defects.

## Humility in Prayer

We are all anxious that God should hear and grant our prayers. He is always ready to do so. The obstacles are always on our side, and one of the chief of these is a want of humility. If God resists the proud, He is not likely to hear their prayers; hence, one of the first requisites of success in my prayers is that I should humble myself before God. Then, and not until then, will my prayer reach the ears of the Most High. "The prayer of him that humbleth himself pierces the clouds."

One of the most dangerous forms of pride is a contempt for others, and one that we may be very prone to without realizing its ruinous effects upon our prayers. When the self-complacent Pharisee thanked God that he was not like the poor publican, he probably was quite unconscious that his prayer was offensive to God. Pride blinded him. So it often blinds us; and we little think, when in prayer we secretly congratulate ourselves on being free from certain faults which we see in our neighbors, that all the while we are displeasing God by thus harshly judging others.

How are we to be humble in prayer? We should be humble in prayer by dwelling on our own miseries and the good points that we see in those around or that we should see if our own pride did not make us blind to others' superiority to us and the fact that the graces God has liberally bestowed on us make our ingratitude and our want of correspondence to them all the more culpable.

## **Models of Humility: Jesus Christ**

When we compare the humility of Jesus Christ with that which is possible to ourselves, it seems as though the virtue in us does not deserve the name, for He who was omnipotent God lowered Himself to become the lowliest of men. Such an act of humility was an infinite abasement of Himself and had an infinite value in the sight of God. The Divine Word submitted to the obliteration of all His glory and majesty when He became man. This was humility indeed! But what is our humility? Simply placing ourselves in a position that more nearly approaches that which we deserve to occupy. When I humble myself, I simply divest myself of the false position of seeming to have any virtue or dignity or claim to honor of my own.

Even when He had lowered Himself to the nature of man, He was not satisfied, but He needed to seek out every kind of contempt and insult. He was regarded as a madman, as possessed with a devil, as a wine-bibber, as an impostor, as a leader of sedition, as a fool, as a criminal, and as a blasphemer. All this He took upon Himself of His own accord and deemed an honor. Is it not strange that I should shrink from sharing what the Son of God chose as the fitting treatment of His Human Nature?

He did more than this. He so identified Himself with human sin that He is said by the Apostle to have been made sin for us, and by this means He was able to find a fresh motive for humbling Himself as being laden with sin in the sight of His Heavenly Father. If He, the spotless Lamb, thus sought out motives of humiliation, how is it that I, on the contrary, seem to avoid all that humbles me?

## **Models of Humility: The Blessed Virgin**

No one of all the children of Adam ever approached the Blessed Virgin Mary in humility. What had she to make her humble? She had no sin or imperfection for which to humble herself before God. Yet the greatest of sinners never humbled himself as did Mary. How was this? It was because no one save she ever recognized her own nothingness in God's sight. This is the surest basis for humility. We are so wanting in humility because we do not recognize our utter insignificance and the absence of any good in us save what is the gift of God.

Thus, it was that, because Mary had a right to the highest place, she always sought the lowest.

This is the law that everywhere prevails. Those who deserve the lowest place seek the highest, and those who deserve the highest seek the lowest. The enemies of God do not like to come down. His friends recognize the lowest place as the place most suitable for them. Am I in this respect one of God's friends or one of His enemies?

Mary's humility was also the result of her desire to be like to her Divine Son in all things. When she saw Him stoop from the highest Heaven to earth, she longed to stoop to the very dust. She placed herself in spirit beneath the feet of all, and would have placed herself lower still if it had been possible. For what humiliation could even Mary endure that was in any way comparable to that of her Son? If Mary, then, is my Queen and Mother, I will seek to imitate her in this. If the Immaculate Mother of God loved to humble herself, how much more should I, who am but a miserable worm of earth?

## **Models of Humility: The Saints**

Some Saints excelled in one virtue, some in another, but all were pre-eminent in humility. The heroes of the Church of God, whether under the Old or the New Dispensation, were marked off from the heroes of paganism by their humility. Thus, Abraham described himself as dust and ashes. Job, in the presence of God, expressed his abhorrence of himself. David, when visited by the hand of God, thanks Him for having humbled him. Daniel declares that to him belongs shame and confusion of face. If, even without the example of Jesus and Mary before them, these Saints were so humble, what ought you to be!

The Saints of the New Testament are still more conspicuous for their humility. Saint Paul believed and declared himself to be the chief of sinners. Saint Bernard expressed his astonishment that God should work miracles by the hands of one so vile as he. Saint Dominic, before entering a city, used to pray that he might not bring down judgments upon it for his sins. Saint Philip Neri used to invent ingenious methods of drawing down ridicule upon himself.

Saint Francis Borgia, when someone by accident spat in his face, merely remarked that he could not have found a more suitable place to spit upon. Compare the humility of these saints with your pride and humble yourself before God.

The saints were not exaggerated in their sentiments. They said with truth that if God had given to the greatest of sinners the graces given to them, they might perhaps have been far holier than they. Think of the graces given you. How often you have abused and rejected them! If the Saints could lament over graces lost, how ought you to humble yourself for your ingratitude.

## **The Fruit of Humility**

There is nothing that gives such a solid peace as humility. At the beginning it is difficult and we smart under the wounds that our pride has to suffer before it can be destroyed in us. But a holy perseverance in the practice of humility will spread over the soul such a sweet and calm tranquility that even in this life the soul begins to taste the joys of the heavenly paradise. Troubles, disappointments, unkindness, injustice, insults, do not disturb the quiet happiness of one who is really humble. One who is truly humble appreciates continually the truth of our Lord's words, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. ... For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Humility is also the best possible safeguard against the attacks of the devil. The humble man can say as our Lord did, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me." Or as Saint Martin said when dying, "Why art thou here, O evil one? No malice wilt thou find in me." Nor has the devil any chance of success in tempting the humble. Their continual disposition is one of dependence on God, and therefore no temptation has power to lead them astray.

Humility is also the root whence all the other virtues spring. A humble man is always charitable, for he never thinks of himself, but always of doing something for God. For the same reason he is full of zeal; he is prudent, for he always relies on God, never on himself; he is a man of prayer, because he looks to God for everything; he is pure in heart, because he never in anything desires to please himself, but always to please God. Are these points of humility to be found in me?

## Humility in Heaven

Is there any place for humility among the Saints in Heaven? Or is it, like faith and hope, a virtue limited to this valley of tears? It might seem that in Heaven there are no motives for humility, no sins, no imperfections, no defects of any kind for which to humble ourselves. Yet only in Heaven will our humility be perfected, for only in Heaven shall we have a thorough knowledge of God and a thorough knowledge of ourselves. This knowledge will make us recognize even more than ever our own nothingness and God's infinite perfections. Our recognition of this will make us forget ourselves, as we never can do on earth, so God will be all in all to us.

Will this appreciation of our own nothingness be painful? No, it will be a source of eternal joy. For then we shall be able to rejoice in God. Our happiness will be unclouded by any interfering thought of self. Our admiration of His perfect beauty will absorb all our faculties. Our absolute dependence on Him will be the truest independence. It will make us conformed to the image of the Son of God, the chief glory in whose Sacred Humanity will be the result of its dependence on His Divine Nature.

Hence in Heaven the angels and saints are represented as casting down their crowns before the throne of God, as falling on their faces and crying continually, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, God of hosts." If the highest dignity and chiefest joy of the saints is to be prostrate before the throne of God, we can never humble ourselves enough on earth since those acts of humility will make our life like the life of Heaven and will fill us with a joy that will be a foretaste of the joy of the redeemed.



## About This EBook

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